



# WESTMINSTER

## Staff Report

TO: The Mayor and Members of the City Council  
DATE: January 7, 2015  
SUBJECT: Briefing and Post-City Council Briefing Agenda for January 12, 2015  
PREPARED BY: J. Brent McFall, City Manager

Please Note: Study Sessions and Post City Council briefings are open to the public, and individuals are welcome to attend and observe. However, these briefings are not intended to be interactive with the audience, as this time is set aside for City Council to receive information, make inquiries, and provide Staff with policy direction.

Looking ahead to Monday night's Briefing and Post-City Council meeting briefing, the following schedule has been prepared:

*A light dinner will be served in the Council Family Room* **5:45 P.M.**

EXECUTIVE SESSION 6:00 P.M.

1. Review and discuss the City Manager finalist candidates pursuant to WMC Section 1-11-3(C)(1) and (7), and C.R.S., Section 24-6-402(4)(e) and (f) - *verbal*

Council Briefing (*The public is welcome to attend.*) 6:30 P.M.

POST BRIEFING (*The public is welcome to attend.*)

### PRESENTATIONS

1. Discussion of Strategic Planning Process - *verbal*

### CITY COUNCIL REPORTS

None at this time.

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

None at this time.

### INFORMATION ONLY

1. 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue Rail Crossing Quiet Zone Establishment

Items may come up between now and Monday night. City Council will be apprised of any changes to the post-briefing schedule.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Brent McFall  
City Manager

**NOTE:** Persons needing an accommodation must notify the City Manager's Office no later than noon the Thursday prior to the scheduled Study Session to allow adequate time to make arrangements. You can call [303-658-2161](tel:303-658-2161) /TTY 711 or State Relay) or write to [mbarajas@cityofwestminster.us](mailto:mbarajas@cityofwestminster.us) to make a reasonable accommodation request.



# WESTMINSTER

## Staff Report

Information Only Staff Report  
January 12, 2015



SUBJECT: 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue Rail Crossing Quiet Zone Establishment

PREPARED BY: Aric Otzelberger, Assistant to the City Manager

### Summary Statement

This report is for City Council information only and requires no action by City Council.

This report is to brief City Council on Staff activity to assess rail crossing quiet zones in the City and the planned establishment of a quiet zone at the 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail crossing. On January 19, 2015, a quiet zone will be formally established and a 24 hour restriction will be placed on the sounding of train horns at this crossing. Due to financial constraints, significant costs and several uncertainties involved with potential quiet zone establishment at other rail crossings, Staff is not pursuing any additional quiet zones at this time. Staff is investigating other potential funding sources to help assist with quiet zone establishment and advocating for potential changes to the quiet zone process at the federal level.

### Background Information

In 2013, Staff worked with the engineering firm of Felsburg Holt and Ullevig (FHU) to complete a quiet zone assessment at the nine at-grade rail crossings in the City of Westminster. This assessment was completed in late 2013. The assessment compiled an inventory of existing conditions at each grade crossing along with improvement options and costs for quiet zone establishment at each crossing. A quiet zone is a section of rail line that contains one or more public crossings where train horns are not routinely sounded. The rail corridor that runs through Westminster is owned and operated by Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF). The nine at-grade crossings in Westminster are all equipped with flashers and gates and are located at:

- Lowell Boulevard
- West 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue
- Bradburn Boulevard
- West 76<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- West 80<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- West 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- Pierce Street
- Wadsworth Boulevard
- West 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Guidelines and minimum requirements for quiet zones are established by the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) "Final Rule on Use of Locomotive Horns at Highway-Rail Grade Crossings"

(Final Rule). The Final Rule sets out technical requirements and conditions that must be present in order for a rail crossing to achieve quiet zone status. While the Final Rule provides a mechanism for local communities to address train horn noise, the technical requirements usually result in substantial costs for quiet zone establishment at a rail crossing.

The total cost for implementation of quiet zones at all of the City's nine rail crossings is estimated between \$2.2 million and \$3.4 million. Actual costs would depend on the success of different treatment concepts at each crossing. One of the primary cost drivers is related to the type of circuitry controlling signals at each crossing. Unfortunately, most crossings in Westminster have old circuitry and the required "constant warning time" circuitry can cost \$150,000 per crossing. When new approach gates, flashers, raised medians, and other costs are considered, quiet zone attainment can climb to \$350,000 to \$400,000 per crossing and even higher in some cases. Maintenance costs for this additional equipment is another long term consideration.

During the quiet zone assessment process, Staff learned that the 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue crossing had upgraded circuitry, the necessary railroad equipment and required roadway elements to be considered for quiet zone establishment. Due to failure of railroad equipment several years ago, BNSF had completed several upgrades at this crossing. Following this discovery, Staff made minor adjustments to the roadway medians to raise their height to meet quiet zone specifications and then initiated the quiet zone establishment process. This included a field diagnostic and subsequent review with representatives from BNSF, FRA, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT). Staff removed two trees in the railroad right of way that posed concerns for certain parties and worked with FHU to provide other necessary documentation. Staff is now in the final stage of this process and anticipates establishment of a quiet zone at 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue on or shortly after January 19, 2015. As the quiet zone process is very detailed and involves numerous parties, the exact date when the horns will cease is not completely certain and is likely to occur several days after January 19, 2015.

The total cost for making modifications to achieve a quiet zone at the 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue crossing, including consultant costs for FHU, was approximately \$25,000. Most of the existing residential neighborhoods impacted by train horn noise at this crossing are in Arvada. With significant residential units included in the City's redevelopment plans for Downtown Westminster, this quiet zone will provide a quality of life amenity for future City residents. Staff was able to pursue quiet zone establishment at this crossing due to the low costs and the excellent chance of successful quiet zone attainment. Unfortunately, the next least-expensive quiet zone crossing would likely amount to at least \$200,000 and most crossings are estimated to cost between \$320,000 to \$430,000. Further complications arise with the proximity of certain crossings to each other. For instance, the Lowell Boulevard, W. 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Bradburn Boulevard crossings are all within ¼ mile from each other and must be established at the same time as a quiet zone "corridor." The costs for this corridor is estimated at \$1 million. It is also important to note that there is no absolute certainty that a quiet zone would ultimately be approved even if certain capital improvements are made, as the improvements have to be in place before a quiet zone application is made and review occurs by the FRA, BNSF, the PUC and CDOT.

With other pressing capital improvement priorities, there is no additional City funding identified at this time for quiet zone establishment at other rail crossings. Staff is researching other potential future funding sources and is working with the U.S. 36 Mayors and Commissioners Coalition on the potential pursuit of funds administered by the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) related to FasTracks and Northwest Rail. This could potentially provide Westminster with another quiet zone, but the City has already utilized some of these DRCOG funds related to the installation of an elevator at Westminster Station. Staff is also working with other Colorado communities on lobbying efforts to re-open the Final Rule and look for potential amendments that could preserve safety while providing more certainty and options for local communities looking to establish quiet zones.

The quiet zone establishment at 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue was made possible through the partnership with FHU and the diligent work of Stephanie Anzia, along with the efforts on numerous City of Westminster Staff including Street Operations Manager Dave Cantu, City Engineer Dave Downing, Senior Engineer Mike Normandin, Transportation Systems Coordinator Greg Olson, City Forester John Kasza and others. Establishing a rail crossing quiet zone at 88<sup>th</sup> Avenue supports City Council’s Strategic Plan goals of “Vibrant and Inclusive Neighborhoods” and “Dynamic, Diverse Economy.”

Respectfully submitted,

J. Brent McFall  
City Manager

Attachment – Railroad Crossing Map

Figure 1. Railroad Quiet Zone Assessment Area

